

NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS NC

Public comment re: Medicaid reform to LOC 10/20/14

My name is Nicholle Karim, and I represent the National Alliance on Mental Illness North Carolina, also known as NAMI, a part of the largest national grassroots organization that promotes recovery and wellness for those living with mental illness. We speak on behalf of the thousands of North Carolinians living with mental illness. We would like to thank you for inviting public comment along with the time and effort you all are giving to such an important issue.

We believe that everyone deserves to live a productive and healthy life. Those living with mental illness want the same things as others: a safe place to live, stable employment, and meaningful relationships. And they want to have a voice in the changes that are made that will deeply affect their everyday lives. When people do not have access to appropriate treatment, costs go up through expensive emergency department visits, incarceration, and lost wages. However, with the right care at the right time, many live healthy and productive lives.

We applaud the thoughtful approach that has been undertaken by the committee in order to ensure our public system is working for those who need it most. Simply put, the mental health system should be simple, straightforward, and have a robust array of services that are easy to access. We support integrating physical and behavioral care, as research indicates many who live with mental illness have chronic medical conditions, such as heart disease or diabetes. Additionally, we also support initiatives that build on North Carolina's strengths, such as the LME-MCO system and nationally recognized programs like CCNC. We support initiatives that are fiscally smart, outcome driven, predictable, and most importantly, provide excellent and timely care.

While considering Medicaid reform, we ask committee members to consider how reform will impact those living with mental illness in our state. To make further organizational changes will result in more confusion and disruption for those who have already experienced constant changes through the continuous mergers of the public MCOs. -We oppose any measures that would further complicate the system, such as moving DMA out of DHHS and changing the governance structure for oversight of the Medicaid program. These changes will add yet another layer of red tape on an already complicated system. Let's give the current system a chance to mature. And let's consider, now that the budget is under control, Medicaid expansion, to make sure that health care is a possibility for another 300,000 to 500,000 North Carolinians.